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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA  
MFA FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

BY

BRENDA KIM CHRISTIANSEN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS


IN

PAINTING

DEPARTMENT OF ART AND DESIGN

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

WINTER 2008



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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of  
Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Final Visual Presentation

Submitted by Brenda Kim Christiansen in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Fine Arts.



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NAME OF AUTHOR: BRENDA KIM CHRISTIANSEN

TITLE OF THESIS: FINAL VISUAL PRESENTATION

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS GRANTED: MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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I hereby release the following works for incorporation into the University Collections,  
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TITLE

DATE

MEDIUM

SIZE

Reflections, Dawn

2007

Oil on Board

28" x 24"





# RESONANT LANDSCAPE



Brenda Kim Christiansen  
MFA Painting

**fab gallery**  
[ FINE ARTS BUILDING GALLERY ]

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# Brenda Kim Christiansen

## Resonant Landscape

### Artist Statement

This exhibition forms a lament for the deterioration of a place, recording Alberta's changing landscape, and noting lingering traces of human presence in rural and parkland areas. The paintings are an echo of the impression left after viewing the contrast in the surrounding countryside where industry and the pastoral have collided. Alberta's wilderness areas have become indelibly marked by signs of our imposition upon the landscape due to burgeoning economic development and the increased pursuit of leisure activities. While the paintings portray the land's scars of desecration, they also elicit a search for a correspondence between the land and self.

Through the painting process, multiple layers of meaning are revealed. Though my initial focus was on negative environmental impact, issues of loss and longing that included memory and body have also risen to the surface. Land could no longer be extricated from self. Martin Friedman wrote, "landscape is the world under the gaze of man... Landscape is not nature. It is a mirror reflecting our fears and fantasies about mankind's place in the world."<sup>1</sup> In drawing the land and self together, states of being that are relevant to the landscape and the individual are established. Whether psychological or physical, issues such as separation, uncertainty, and decay, forge links between both. I found that as this correspondence grew in my work, the universality of its nature became more apparent, and the necessity to reveal specific locale diminished.

In contemporary Western culture, the individual's sense of relationship to the land has become increasingly distant, both with regards to our own lives and in an understanding of our impact upon the environment. Knowledge of environmental catastrophes is generally mediated through brief encounters via diverse media. Because of the constant sensory bombardment, urban eyes and mind are now trained to experience the environment through quick roving glances. Rebecca Solnit, in noting the difference between rural and urban ways of looking, writes that the urbanite does not scan and absorb the panoramic view, but instead looks for details, "particulars, for opportunities..."<sup>2</sup> We use the visual language with which we are already familiar to interpret our surroundings, therefore our reaction when exposed to rural spaces is to approach them in a similar vein. The choice to portray intimate exposures of landscapes capitalizes on this way of looking. In contrast, the painting's surface facilitates a slower mode of analysis by creating a contemplative space that facilitates the forging of connections.

The recurring imagery of the ponds and excavated pits found on pipeline sites has taken prominence in my research. The deep pits were archaeological digs, a search for past traces of presence, undertaken during the preparatory stripping of the earth. The ponds surrounded by scarred banks and reflecting back the few remaining stands of trees, maintained an opposing air of tranquility. The visual impact experienced while walking through these sites was an epiphany for me that moved well beyond analytical evaluations. The consequences





of the desecration affected an intense visceral response within myself. I wanted to evoke that emotive element through the medium of paint. Gaston Bachelard talks of the need for sensual perception to overtake sensory perception if a poetic image is going to move beyond literal illustration: the illusion must reach a deeper, innate level, appealing to our connection with one of the four elements, such as water, a natural symbol of purity.<sup>3</sup> I was drawn by the contrast between what is seen and what is hidden or removed through man's interactions with the land.

These landscapes strive to form correspondences between land and self. They also imbue place with vitality and significance, even though location remains anonymous. Each image moves through a series of interpretations that serves as a process of removal from its origins: sketches, photographs, memories, studies, print, paint. I choose to rework an image to mirror the diversity of responses available, dependent upon time, place, and circumstance. The melding of materials and image heightens the paintings' sense of ambiguity. Paint utilizes texture, colour, light, and scale to draw the viewer in to search the surface for traces of a meaning that is implied but never fully revealed. Allowing the process and the layering to remain visible further establishes connections between content and form. The hand of the artist remains present as verification of the subjective capturing of what exists beyond the visual record of a place. A space is created for the viewer to exist between the artist and the art, to engage beyond the level of surface imagery.

February 2008

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Friedman. "As Far as the Eye can See." Visions of America. Landscape as Metaphor in the Twentieth Century. Ed. Mildred Friedman. New York: Harry Abrams Inc., 1994, 22.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Solnit. A History of Walking. New York: Penguin Books, 2001, 174.

<sup>3</sup> Gaston Bachelard. Water and Dreams. An essay on the imagination of matter. Dallas: Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1999 [c1983], 120.





# Brenda Kim Christiansen

MFA Exhibition, FAB Gallery

February 2008

## Resonant Landscape

### Slide List

No.	Title	Dimensions	Medium
1	Reflections, Dawn	28" x 24"	oil on board
2	Storm Watch	28" x 24"	oil on board
3	Remains	24" x 20"	oil on board
4	Grove	49" x 41"	oil on board
5	Slough	35" x 41"	oil on board
6	Fall Reflection	12" x 12"	oil on board
7	Contained	35" x 41"	oil on board
8	Winter Spill – 1	24.375" x 41"	oil on board
9	Winter Spill – 2	24.375" x 41"	oil on board
10	Winter Spill – 3	24.375" x 41"	oil on board
11	All that's left	36" x 72"	oil on canvas
12	Sullied Waters – 1	41" x 49"	oil on board
13	Sullied Waters – 2	41" x 49"	oil on board
14	Overflow	49" x 41"	oil on board
15	Winter Pits	48" x 36"	oil on canvas
16	Nearing Twilight – 1	20.25" x 24.25"	oil on board
17	Slippage	48" x 77"	oil on board
18	Nearing Twilight – 2	20.25" x 24.25"	oil on board
19	Staked	49" x 41"	oil on board





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## Resonant Landscape

### Slide List

No.	Title	Dimensions	Medium
20	Deadfall	11.875" x 7.375"	oil on board
21	Full Moon	12" x 10.125"	oil on board
22	Snow Pit	14.625" x 11.875"	oil on board
23	Wound	9.375" x 18.25"	oil on board
24	Last Stand	10" x 5.125"	oil on board
25	Barren – 1	16" x 16"	oil on board
26	Barren – 2	16" x 16"	oil on board
27	Staked – study	12" x 11"	oil on board
28	Excavations – 1	9" x 12"	oil on board
29	Remains, study	12" x 11.75	oil on board
30	Winter Pits - study	14.625" x 11.875"	oil on board
31	Open Pits	12" x 11.25"	oil on board
32	Reflections, Dawn – study	12" x 10"	oil on board
33	Pastoral	9.75" x 11.75"	oil on board
34	Excavations – 2	10" x 8"	oil on board



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## Resonant Landscape – Installation Views

### Slide List

No.	Title
1.A	Entrance to FAB Gallery
2.A	South room
3.A	South wall of the South room
4.A	North-west corner of the South room
5.A	Wall at end of ramp, heading towards the window
6.A	Main wall facing the window
7.A	Centre room
8.A	North-east room



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